



United Kingdom

PROFILE

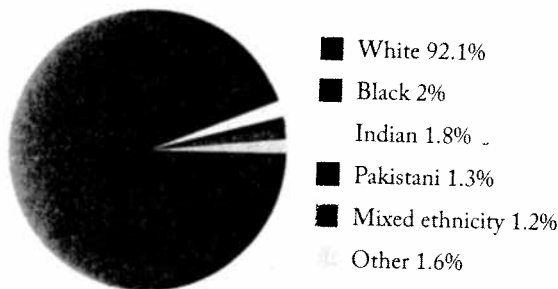
Key Features of the Contemporary United Kingdom

Population:	63,047,162 (estimate, July 2012)
Area:	243,610 square kilometers
Head of State:	Queen Elizabeth II (since 1952)
Head of Government:	David Cameron (prime minister, since 2010)
Capital:	London
Year of Independence:	Never colonized. Political arrangements linking Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England have changed over time.
Year of Current Constitution:	Common law system; there is no formal constitution, though the Magna Carta dates back to the thirteenth century.
Languages:	English is the majority language. Other languages include Scots, Scottish Gaelic, Irish, and Welsh.
GDP per Capita:	\$36,600 (estimate as of 2011)
Human Development Index Ranking (2011):	28 (very high human development)

Sources: UN Human Development Reports, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>; CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>.

Introduction

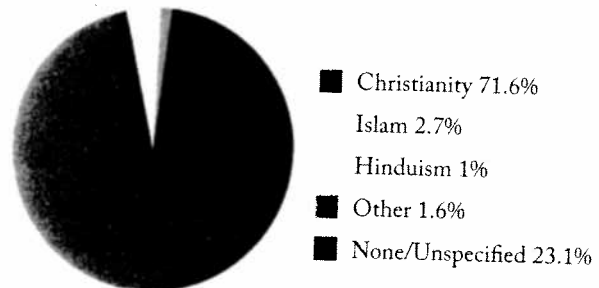
It is often noted that the United Kingdom is an island society, and that this has had important implications for its development. It is relatively small, comprising only about 244,000 square kilometers, and yet in several important ways it pioneered key features of modern politics. While it lacks a formal, written constitution, it was perhaps the society in which the idea of a "constitutional order" first emerged. Its parliament survived the rise of absolutism (or, as some would put it, Britain never saw full-scale absolutism at all), and constitutional monarchy was established early, with the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688–1689. Moreover, many scholars consider it to have been among the first societies, and possibly the first, to establish modern national identity (Hastings 1997; Greenfeld 1992; Kohn 1944). Finally, Britain was a lead colonizer, spreading many of its political practices abroad. There is a lively discussion among political scientists about whether British colonialism produced democratic independent societies following de-colonization (e.g., Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2004).



Ethnic Groups in the United Kingdom, Based on the 2001 Census

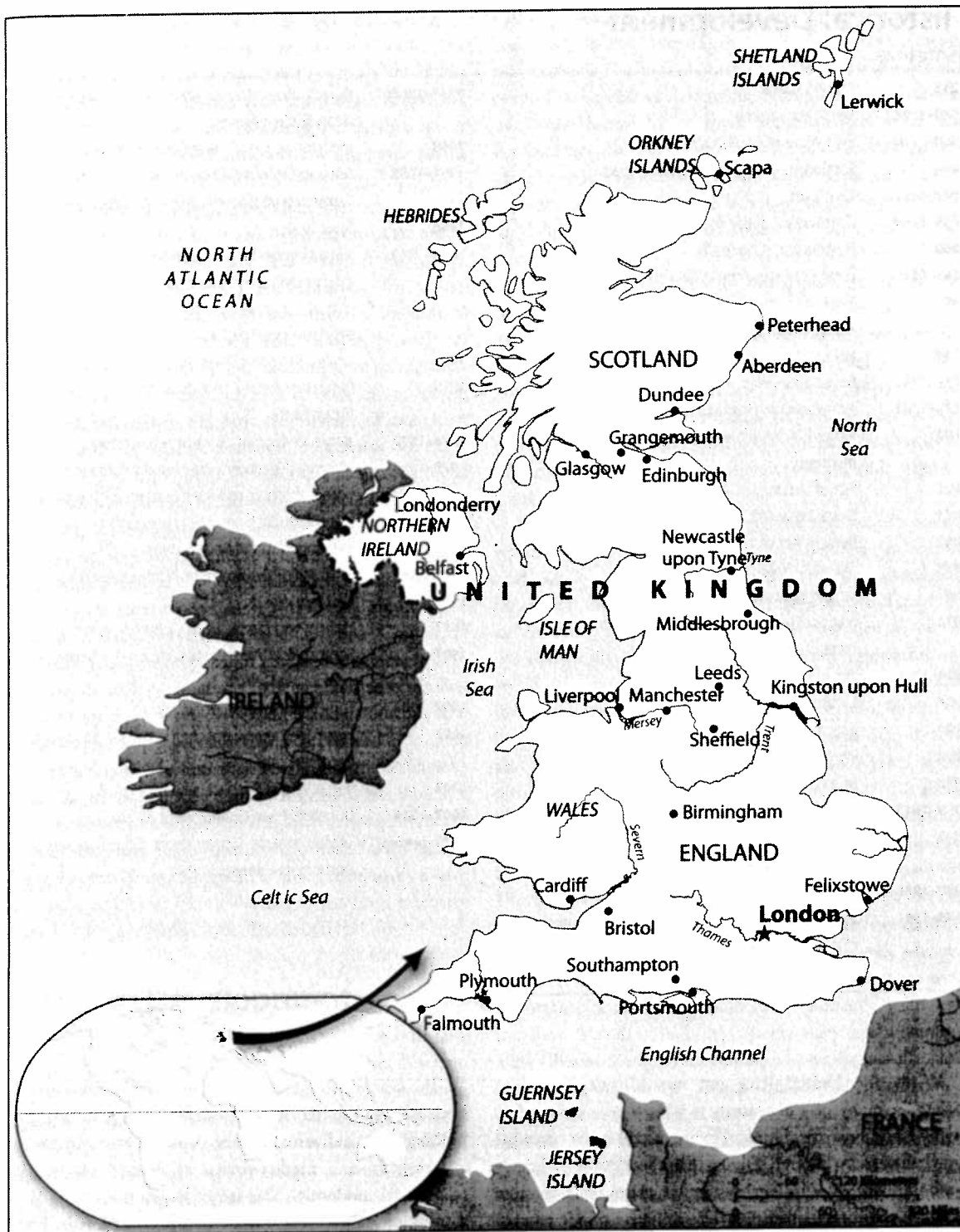
Note that within the category "white," more than 80 percent consider themselves English, with the bulk of the remainder being groups that consider themselves Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish.

Source: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>.



Religious Affiliation in the United Kingdom, 2001 Census

Source: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>.



Historical Development

Timeline

1215	Magna Carta	1947–1960s	Waves of decolonization in India, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere
1530–1534	Break from Rome	1949	Independence of Ireland (except Northern Ireland)
1580s–1700	First Wave of English Colonialism	1951–1955	Second Churchill Government (Conservative). Conservative governments will continue until 1964.
1600	Establishment of East India Company	1956	Suez Crisis
1642–1651	Civil Wars	1964–1970	James Harold Wilson Government (Labour). Labour governments will succeed each other until 1979, with the exception of the 1970–1974 (Heath) Conservative government.
1649–1659	Cromwell and the Protectorate (1653–1659)	1973	United Kingdom joins the Common Market (EC).
1660	Restoration (Charles II)	1975	Referendum on Common Market (EC) Membership (Approved)
1688–1689	Glorious Revolution (William and Mary)	1976–1979	James Callaghan Government (Labour)
1694	Creation of the Bank of England	1979–1990	Margaret Thatcher Government (Conservative). Some efforts to reduce the scope of the welfare state, including notable privatizations.
1707	Act of Union (England and Scotland)	1982	Falkland Islands/Malvinas War
1714	Hanoverians inherit the throne (George I)	1990–1997	John Major Government (Conservative)
1756–1763	Seven Years War	1991	First Iraq War
1776–1783	American Revolution	1997	Hong Kong passes from United Kingdom to China.
1798	Major Irish revolt led by Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen	1997	Scottish and Welsh voters choose to create their own legislatures.
1801	Act of Union	1997–2007	Tony Blair Government (Labour)
1807	Slave Trade Act	2002	Eurozone begins, but the United Kingdom opts not to participate.
1832	Reform Act of 1832	2003	Beginning of Second Iraq War
1833	Slavery Abolition Act	2007–2010	Gordon Brown Government (Labour)
1867	Voting rights extended	2010–present	David Cameron Government (Conservative/Liberal Democrats Coalition)
1911	National Insurance Act (early, very limited welfare state development)		
1914–1918	World War I		
1918	Limited women's suffrage		
1921	Emergence of Irish Free State		
1930	Women's suffrage		
1938	Munich Pact		
1939–1945	World War II		
1942	Beveridge Report (very influential in subsequent welfare state development)		
1940–1945	Churchill government		
1945–1951	Labour Government with Clement Atlee as prime minister. Creation of British welfare state, including National Health Service (1948).		

While the United Kingdom was historically a lead society in many of these areas, it is now often viewed as highly traditionalistic. Unlike France, it still has a constitutional monarchy, though Queen Elizabeth's role is largely symbolic. Moreover, its legal system is a common law system in which traditional practice is determinative of outcomes.

The United Kingdom, along with the United States, has been a key promoter of the modern ideology of liberalism, holding that individual rights; representative, democratic government; and market-driven economics are the keys to political modernity. This is not to say that it has lacked a tradition of left-wing organizing, and the left in Britain

has historically had a number of successes, most notably in the decades immediately following the Second World War (Clarke 2004: 221–224). Among other things, the British left played a key role in the construction of the United Kingdom's relatively robust welfare state, including the highly popular Health Service (the United Kingdom's single-payer health care system).

As can be seen in the population chart, the majority of the population of the United Kingdom is white Britons. As noted, around 80 percent of these individuals consider themselves to be English, with the remainder identifying themselves as Scottish, Northern Irish, or Welsh. Around 2 percent of the U.K. population is of African descent, with the majority of this population having descended from immigrants from Britain's former Caribbean and African colonies (or having immigrated themselves). Similarly, the presence of more than 3 percent of the population that is of South Asian descent is owed, in part, to the legacy of British colonialism, as social network ties with citizens of former colonies are strong.

In religious terms, the largest group in the United Kingdom, at over 70 percent, is Christian. However, it is worth keeping several things in mind when you interpret this. First, the largest population within this group is the Anglican Church, which is the established Church of England. Second, the other major groups would include both other Protestant denominations as well as Roman Catholics. Finally, a large share of this 70 percent is understood by social scientists to be only nominally Christian. Indeed, it is often claimed that more Muslims than Anglicans attend religious services in the United Kingdom each week (a fact which, if true, points both to low levels of religiosity among Anglicans and high religiosity among British Muslims). In any case, it is clear that the United Kingdom is now a religiously diverse society, and one in which secularization has been extensive (Berger, Davie, and Fokas 2008; Bruce 2004).

Historical Development

As noted already, the United Kingdom (or Great Britain, and before the union with Scotland and Ireland, England itself) is often viewed as an "early modernizer." It was among the first growth-oriented, modern economies and, relatedly, among the first "commercial societies" (Greenfeld 2001). It was the first Western European society to break from the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. It was among the first with a constitutional order, though it has no formal,

written, constitution. Its parliament helped it to resist royal absolutism in the seventeenth century, though the cost of this was civil war. Indeed, in the middle of the seventeenth century it existed as a republic, before the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1688. Some scholars argue that England was the first society to establish a modern national identity (Hastings 1997; Kohn 1944; Greenfeld 1992). Finally, according to some scholars (e.g., Pincus 2009), its "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 and 1689 was the first modern revolution.

Yet this should not lead us to suppose that the United Kingdom suddenly came to assume all of the features that we associate with political modernity some centuries ago. Rather, the political history of the British Isles is a story of gradual change with several key moments of "punctuated" and more rapid transformation. In this section we will very briefly survey some of the key political developments of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

In much of the rest of Europe, the seventeenth century was the century of royal absolutism. The state grew as the centralizing monarch marginalized his noble and religious opponents. In England, however, things were different (for an excellent overview of this highly complicated period, see Kishlansky 1996). Parliament remained powerful, and could on occasions effectively resist royal efforts to collect taxes. Moreover, religious dissent was common. When the king tried to enforce religious orthodoxy and then to force parliament to consent to taxation, the Civil Wars, which pitted the "Roundheads" against the royalist "Cavaliers," broke out. The King, Charles I, was deposed and eventually executed in 1649. Oliver Cromwell dominated English (and Scottish and Irish) politics until his death (Kishlansky 1996: 187–212). Once Cromwell was gone, though, the country turned back to the Stuarts, and Charles II was crowned in the Restoration. He was followed by James II, who was criticized because of his Catholic leanings. Perhaps more important, James II set about to dramatically strengthen the state, including building a larger navy and a standing army (Pincus 2009). With the support of some well-placed Britons, however, the Dutch Stadtholder, William of Orange, invaded. He faced almost no resistance, and he and his wife, Mary (who was a Stuart), were crowned King and Queen in the "Glorious Revolution." In general this period witnessed heightened political activity, with lots of coffee-house discussion and pamphlet writing, which some have

argued led to the creation of the first modern “public sphere” (Habermas 1991). It also witnessed the development of the two parties, the Whigs (more liberal) and the Tories (more conservative) who would dominate British politics for many years (Kishlansky 1996: 313–335).

The eighteenth century largely witnessed a return to stability (Langford 2010). Political stabilization was evidenced by the end of Jacobite “pretenders” (people who claimed to be the true heirs to the Stuart line) and the transition to the House of Hanover. Prime Minister Robert Walpole practiced a sort of machine politics, and many think of the eighteenth century as one in which a kind of new, commercial aristocracy established itself. Throughout the century, Britain had notable military success, both in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) and in the Seven Years War (1756–1763), though it failed in its effort to hold onto the colonies that became the United States. Commercial society grew, and in the second half of the century Britain saw the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, in which technologically adapted manufacturing, especially of textiles, dramatically expanded productivity (Harvie 2010: 475–481). This had numerous consequences, as it made new fortunes, slowly but surely changed the nature of labor, and led eventually to the urbanization of British society. At the same time, there is evidence that all of these changes were experienced by some as disorienting. The literature and art of the eighteenth century shows this, and there was a heightened concern for social problems like poverty and starvation, perhaps because these were increasing (Langford 2010: 424–438). In the religious field, new forms of Protestantism emerged and spread, especially Methodism, which would play a critical role in the abolition (of the slavery and the slave trade) and reform movements (of British politics) that began to develop by the end of the century.

The nineteenth century, for much of which Queen Victoria held the throne, was a time of expanding liberalism, the extension of suffrage, and the solidification and expansion of British colonialism (Harvie 2010; Matthew 2010). Beginning early in the late eighteenth century, and accelerating in the nineteenth, some British leaders (often Whigs but also some Tories) advocated expanding the electorate and updating parliamentary representation to make it more representative of the industrializing and urbanizing society that Britain had become. At the same time, popular actors came to make more demands on government (Tilly 1997). The Reform Act of 1832 expanded the vote, though one still

needed to have property to vote even after this act. However, social movement activity began to develop, perhaps most notably the “Chartist movement,” which drew on industrial workers and used strikes and demonstrations in its effort to expand suffrage and representation (Harvie 2010: 498–499). Further voting reform took place in 1867, where suffrage was extended, though only to (some) males and while by today’s standards it would still be considered highly restricted.

Britain’s twentieth-century experience (like that of other advanced industrial societies of the time) was largely shaped by the two world wars and the Great Depression (Morgan 2010a; Clarke 2004). World War I was enormously costly in terms of both lives and resources, but Britain and its allies emerged victorious. Voting rights were further extended in the post-war years, notably to women. As of 1918, women over thirty who met certain conditions could vote, and after 1928 all men and women over twenty-one were able to exercise this right. Britain, like most of the world, suffered serious economic difficulties in the late 1920s and the 1930s. The country aimed to stay out of World War II, and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain famously appeased Hitler at Munich, but they were eventually forced to participate in the war after Germany invaded Poland. While not as many British soldiers died in World War II as in World War I, fighting was intense, and Britons had to face constant German air raids, which killed an estimated sixty thousand civilians (Morgan 2010a).

As we discuss further later in this profile, in the post-war years the Labour party was ascendant, and it worked to construct the British welfare state (Clarke 2004: 216–247). This welfare state has been somewhat reduced in subsequent years, especially in the administration of Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990), but important components of it have been remarkably resilient (Prasad 2006). Another, major, twentieth-century development was the shrinking and eventual disappearance of the British Empire (Clarke 2004). Once it had stretched across the globe, but in the mid- to late twentieth century almost all of the United Kingdom’s colonies achieved independence, though most retained some ties to Britain and to each other through the Commonwealth of Nations (initially called the British Commonwealth). The United Kingdom also slowly achieved partial, if controversial, integration with Europe, joining the European Communities in 1973, though it decided not to adopt the Euro, and even as powers were partially devolved to Scottish and Welsh legislatures in the late 1990s.

Regime and Political Institutions

Regime	Constitutional monarchy, with parliamentary democracy
Powers in Constitution	No formal written constitution; but widely considered to include certain established laws and rights that are assumed to have constitutional status
Administrative Divisions	Great Britain (includes England, Scotland, and Wales) and Northern Ireland; three island dependencies (Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey); over a dozen overseas territories (British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Falkland Islands, etc.)
Executive Branch	Prime minister and cabinet
Selection of Executive	Elected by House of Commons
Legislative Branch	Bicameral Parliament Lower chamber: House of Commons Upper chamber: House of Lords
Judicial Branch	Interprets statutes, but has no right of judicial review
Political Party System	Two-party to three-party system; Conservatives (Tories) and Labour are two main parties; Liberal Democrats are third party.

Regime and Political Institutions

Government in the United Kingdom is based on the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, which holds that Parliament (and particularly the House of Commons) is the supreme lawmaking body, and that whatever it votes into law is deemed constitutional. Acts of Parliament are not subject to judicial review and can only be overturned by subsequent acts of Parliament. While the legislature is supreme, the executive branch of government is powerful, being led by a prime minister who is selected by majority vote of the House of Commons. The prime minister is routinely the leader of the party winning the most seats in the parliamentary elections, and he/she in turn selects a cabinet that proposes and presents most bills for passage into law by the broader House. This government remains in office for a term of up to five years, as long as it maintains the "confidence" of the House of Commons; elections must be held at least every five years, and the executive can be reelected for multiple terms. Parliament has the power to "bring down" the prime minister's government by a majority vote of no confidence (or by defeat of a major bill, which is often interpreted as

a vote of no confidence), while the prime minister has the power to dissolve Parliament and ask the monarch to call for a new election. Dissolution may happen either when the executive believes Parliament is unable to govern, or when the prime minister senses an electoral advantage in calling an election. In general, bills proposed by the prime minister's government are passed by the House of Commons, due to strong discipline within political parties.

Despite the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, there are some practical limitations on Parliament. Nominally, the monarch calls elections and invites winning parties to form government, though the monarch's role is almost exclusively ceremonial rather than political. More substantively, Parliament itself is governed by traditions, customs, and constitutional interpretations: Though Parliament could theoretically pass any law it wants, it routinely stays within the bounds of common interpretations of the British constitution. A final restraint on Parliament in recent years has seen some devolution of power from the U.K. Parliament to assemblies in the regions or "countries" of the United Kingdom (the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly), as well as some recognition of the powers of the European Union to legislate on certain matters that are binding on British law.

Political Culture

Political culture in the United Kingdom, like in other countries, is heterogeneous and dynamic and therefore hard to pin down. The classic comparative study of Almond and Verba (1963) treated the United Kingdom as possessing a vibrant “civic culture.” Several themes, though, have been particularly important in the political culture of late-twentieth and twenty-first-century Great Britain and are, therefore, worth special mention.

The first theme concerns the shifting nature of liberalism and the relationship between class affiliation and party loyalty. A highly stratified society, the United Kingdom in the early to mid-twentieth century saw a strong relationship between working-class membership and Labour party support. By the 1970s, however, this had begun to change (Morgan 2010a). On one hand, this change might be attributed to the stagflation the British economy faced in that decade. On the other hand, the United Kingdom witnessed a familiar pattern in the political-cultural development of post-industrial societies. Rising incomes and a major shift in the composition of the labor market—a move away from manufacturing and toward services—have generally been found to change political culture, rendering it more individualistic and less tied to communities and classes (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). By the 1970s, Labour was in crisis, and it would not take power again until it had come to represent the interests, and match the cultural style, of middle-class service sector workers (Morgan 2010a; Clarke 2004: 401–439). This “New Labour” has had to contend with a resurgent liberalism, which preceded it in the form of the reforms of Margaret Thatcher’s governments (1979–1990) and, to a lesser extent, the government of her successor John Major (1990–1997), but also, more recently, following the electoral success of current Prime Minister David Cameron of the Conservative party, which governs in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Cameron and his associates, in addition to scaling back aspects of the welfare state, explicitly speak of transforming British political culture, hoping to create what they call the “Big Society,” in which voluntarism and community activity partially replace the actions of the state.

Another major theme in the changing political culture of twentieth-century Britain was the redefinition of British identity in the wake of the collapse of the British Empire. “Empire” had been a key aspect of the identity of subjects

of the United Kingdom for at least the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (this is not to say that empire was unimportant before this, but that the imperial nature of Britishness became especially salient at this time). Relatedly, the role of the monarchy in British political culture has gradually changed. The Queen is still important, but the royal family has for some time now been much more discussed in gossip tabloids than in political newspapers (Morgan 2010b: 674; Clarke 2004: 388, 418–419). Their role is largely symbolic, and even still they are not typically treated with the same deference as their (also symbolic) forebears from the early to mid-twentieth century were. As is discussed later, in the case study of national identity in the United Kingdom, to some extent these changes have coincided with other changes in British identity, including a growing resurgence of regional-national identities and the growth of a multicultural understanding of citizenship (Modood 2007). However, this should not lead us to suspect that Britishness has ceased to be an important feature of political culture in the United Kingdom. The population of the United Kingdom has been noted for its relatively high level of “euro-skepticism.” This cultural feature of the population has important policy consequences: For example, the United Kingdom has never joined the eurozone.

Political Economy

As mentioned in other sections of this country profile and as discussed in the case studies that follow, the United Kingdom has had a central role in the history of global political economy. It was the site of origin for many ideas about free trade (even if the country did not always practice them if unsuited to its interests); it had arguably the first modern, growth-oriented economy; it was the launching point for the industrial revolution; and it played an important role in constructing the global economy through its formal colonialism and informal efforts to trade with other parts of the world. It is worth keeping in mind, though, the United Kingdom’s political economy in the post-war world, as the country underwent enormous changes in that period. The two most important in this connection are (1) the de-colonization of many of its overseas possessions, and the accompanying recalibration of Britain’s role in both global politics and the global economy; and (2) the creation of the British welfare state. The latter development is discussed

further later, in the case study on development in the United Kingdom.

Like many other lead industrializers, Britain has become a post-industrial economy, meaning, in essence, that services (which account for 77.8 percent of GDP) dramatically outstrip manufacturing (21.4 percent) in economic importance. Britain is also notable for the small share that agriculture plays in its GDP, constituting only 0.7 percent (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>). The country has the thirty-third-highest GDP per capita in the world, and its estimated unemployment rate as of 2011 stood at 8.1 percent, relatively low given recent global economic difficulties. Its Gini score (which measures income inequality) stands at 34, which means it is the ninety-first-most unequal society in the world in terms of income distribution. This may be hard to interpret, but it is around the average for Western European societies with redistributive welfare states. As of 2006, though, it was estimated to have a poverty rate of 14 percent, which is comparatively quite high.

As is discussed in more detail in the case studies that follow, the welfare state in the United Kingdom has faced political opposition since the early 1980s. As such, it makes an interesting comparison with France, which saw no Margaret Thatcher arise in that decade (see further discussion in the French case). One major theory focuses on the politics of retrenchment, noting that in places like the United Kingdom (and the United States), the welfare state was created by parties on the left in response to the crises of the middle of the twentieth century (the Great Depression and World War II). This creates the possibility of a strident opposition from across the spectrum (Prasad 2006; Huber and Stephens 2001).

Source for basic economic data in this discussion: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html> (accessed August 14, 2012).

CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY

The State in the United Kingdom

CHAPTER 3, PAGE 65

As with many other aspects of the political development of the United Kingdom, the state in the British Isles, beginning in England, had strong early development and then, in some ways, did not later develop as rapidly as some cases to which we might wish to compare it. Scholars who study the rise of the state point to late medieval England as a place where the modern state first started to come into view (Strayer 1970: 35–48). England was likely aided in this by several factors. First, it is a relatively small island, facilitating centralized rule. Second, historically, the English nobility was in certain respects not as strong as its peers on the continent, and by the time of the rise of the Tudor

monarchy (late fifteenth century), it had badly damaged itself through internal conflict, most notably in the “War of the Roses.” In terms of the actual mechanics of English state-building, Strayer (1970: 37–38), in his classic account, stresses the late medieval rise of royal officials, the royal court system, and the emergence of the Exchequer as key in this connection. All of these institutions either increased the king’s role as an arbiter of domestic disputes (thus moving in the direction of the Weberian “monopoly on legitimate force”) or expanded the state’s ability to record information and, in essence, to monitor localities and its dealings with them.

As noted previously, England never fully embraced royal absolutism, which, in places like France, was a key stage in modern state-building. In France, the modern state emerged, in part, as successive kings managed to expand their power vis-à-vis the nobility. At first glance, it looks like the English kings of the seventeenth century failed in this endeavor. But there is more here than meets the eye. While it is true that Parliament successfully resisted royal initiatives, it was not simply an organ that represented the upper nobility. Indeed, many of the upper nobility in the seventeenth century sided with Charles I rather than Parliament and Cromwell, though this was by no means



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universal. When Charles II and especially James II, after the restoration, set about building a more modern state, with a more complex bureaucracy, a greater ability to extract resources from its citizens, and with a modern military, there was resistance in the form of the Glorious Revolution (Pincus 2009), but this did not stop the effort. Subsequent monarchs continued James's state-building efforts in important ways (Kishlansky 1996).

One of the great tensions in the history of British state-building is that the society produced a relatively strong

state but also, as discussed elsewhere in this text, an ideology—liberalism—that seems very suspicious of strong states. Even today, as mentioned earlier, David Cameron's government stresses the "Big Society," implying that the private action of citizens should replace a state that has allegedly grown too large and powerful. More generally, the British welfare state is probably best viewed as an organization that developed because of factors external to British politics writ narrow: two world wars, the Great Depression, and the changing British class structure. Note

that many of its features, as in the United States, only developed around World War II (indeed, in the Labour government that was elected in 1945), though there were precedents in the early twentieth century (Clarke 2004: 59–60). In France, typical arguments against preserving the welfare state in its entirety focus largely on questions like the efficiency of labor markets and economic competitiveness. In places like the United Kingdom (and the United States), there is an alternative, liberal, critique of the welfare state as a result of this tension.



Development and Political Economy of Britain

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The United Kingdom may be seen as the birthplace of the modern world economy. While not considered a "developing country" today, the British experience has been the basis of many of the most enduring research questions in the study of development, precisely because it is the country where the massive economic expansion of the last two centuries started. It was here, from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, that the Industrial Revolution began, giving rise to the explosion in productivity and rising incomes that have set the last two centuries apart from any other period of human history.

The desire to understand why the Industrial Revolution happened here rather than somewhere else was the beginning of the comparative study of

modern economic development, and analysts have put forward numerous theses. The Industrial Revolution consisted of a cluster of technological innovations that drove down costs of production and brought about rapid industrialization: new inventions (such as the steam engine), new factory techniques (including greater use of machinery), and improved infrastructure (such as railways and improved shipping). Other factors helped make this set of innovations work especially well in Britain. Some argue that the availability of coal mattered, while others argue that the country was relatively urbanized. Yet others suggest that development happened here due to attitudes and culture, whether in the populace at large or in the relatively liberal government with

its orientation toward individual economic rights. Also in the 1800s, Great Britain consolidated its imperial control over colonies ranging from Africa to India to the Caribbean, though it had lost control of America by 1783. As the Industrial Revolution spread, the United Kingdom became a leader in the globalization that transformed the world economy from the late nineteenth century up to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Britain was a leader in promoting the *laissez-faire* or liberal economic policies that had been dominant in years before the Great Depression, but it also was the home of economist John Maynard Keynes, who offered a twentieth-century approach to preventing depression and taming the business cycle: counter-cyclical



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government spending. A central idea of Keynesian economics is that recessions and depressions are self-reinforcing because demand drops as employment falls and assets lose their value, and that government spending can halt or reverse this process by stimulating demand. In theory, governments could build up surpluses in good times and spend as necessary to soften or stop downturns. This theory was (and remains) hugely influential, as over the course of the century the state intervened more in the economy in Britain and beyond.

After surviving the two world wars without defeat, the United Kingdom has remained one of the linchpin economies of the global order. State involvement in the economy increased notably after World War II. The Labour party, under the leadership of Clement Atlee, won a plurality for the first time in 1945,

displacing the Conservative party from which both Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill had governed. The British welfare state was relatively underdeveloped up to this point, but it grew notably in the post-war years, particularly through the establishment of the National Health Service and the expansion of public housing initiatives (called “council houses”), as well as social insurance (Clarke 2004: 216–231).

As in many other advanced industrial societies, Britain did relatively well in the post-war years, but by the 1970s had entered into recession and “stagflation” (inflation accompanied by stagnation in economic growth and wages). This prompted some rethinking, and one of the major changes in the country’s economic policy took place beginning in 1979, when the newly elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (“the Iron Lady”) pushed the

economy toward free-market principles by privatizing state-owned enterprises (including many council houses, increasing home-ownership rates in the process, but also business organizations), reducing government spending, and deregulating the economy (Clarke 2004: 358–400). Notably, the Thatcher government (1979–1990) barely attempted to scale back some key aspects of the welfare state, such as the National Health Service, given their high levels of public support (Prasad 2006). Following the era of Thatcher and her Conservative successor John Major (1990–1997), the government of Tony Blair (1997–2007) brought in an era of “New Labour” that largely retained a pro-market orientation. Today, the British economy is actively plugged into world trade, especially in services, where the City of London is a top financial center in the global economy.



Gradual Democratization in the United Kingdom

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The United Kingdom stands out among the world’s leading democracies in its status as a constitutional monarchy (though it is not, of course, the only one). Indeed, as this book goes to press, the memory of Queen Elizabeth’s sixtieth-anniversary “jubilee” is recent, and not long ago the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton captivated the nation (and many across the world). To many distant and unfamiliar observers, the

United Kingdom seems ancient, even anachronistic, in its politics. Yet relatively few societies are, by most political science measures, *more* democratic. How could this be?

For centuries, in fact, the United Kingdom (and before it England and Great Britain) has been held up as an example of gradual democratization from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy governed by a democratically elected

parliament. The conservative social thinker Edmund Burke, at the time of the French Revolution, famously argued that his country could avoid France’s violence and turbulence because a gradual process had already laid the groundwork for a liberal polity (see discussion in Pincus 2009: 22–25). Some versions of this view later became associated with a conception of British history characterized as “Whiggish.” This was the idea that contemporary



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democracy in the United Kingdom was somehow foreordained by early developments in English and British history such as the Magna Carta of 1215, the break from Rome in the 1530s under Henry VIII, the seventeenth-century civil wars, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and so forth. This idea is generally rejected by social scientists.

Just the same, the United Kingdom *did* see gradual democratization, and some of these steps are important parts of that story. Whereas continental European states saw parliamentary representation wane in the early modern period, in England it was strengthened, and the parliament was powerful and important. Above all, its importance owed to its ability to authorize or restrict taxation, but particularly in the seventeenth century, Parliament became concerned about issues beyond taxation alone, including the perception, on the part of some, that James I and later Charles I had exceeded their "constitutional" authority (for a good overview of this period, see Kishlansky 1998). As discussed in the Historical Development

section, these and related disputes (about religion, among other things) led to civil war, the execution of Charles I, and rule by Cromwell. After Cromwell's death, the Stuart kings were restored, but the Catholic James II alienated many, both for religious reasons and because of his efforts to build the capacity of the state (Pincus 2009). The "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, which brought William and Mary to power, consolidated constitutional monarchy. Nobody would consider the country that emerged a "democracy" by modern standards. The monarch (unelected, of course) was still a major political decision maker, and Parliament in eighteenth-century Britain under ministers like Robert Walpole was hardly representative of the broader British people. But democratic practice did increase. Scholars note the crystallization of "Whig" and "Tory" parties in the late seventeenth century, and some argue that a "public sphere" emerged in the late seventeenth century in coffeehouses and through print media (Habermas 1989; see also discussion in Pincus 2009: 74–81). Furthermore, the

partial and very limited democratization of the seventeenth century inspired democratic actors throughout the United Kingdom (perhaps most notably in what would become the United States) as they pushed back against authoritarianism in later years (Pincus 2009). Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the depth of democracy in the United Kingdom increased. Suffrage expanded in several spurts. Here social movement activity played a key role, including the Chartist movement of the 1830s and 1840s (see Tilly and Wood 2009: 45–48 and Tilly 1995) and later the feminist movement. One must also think of first the end of the slave trade and then eventual decolonization as a democratic expansion as well (even if, in some cases, post-colonial regimes did not take democratic form). As you consider these developments, think about how they might fit in relation to the major theories of democratization discussed in the chapter. Is one or another theory better poised to explain this pattern of gradual democratization?



No Constitution? No Supreme Court? Constitutionality in the United Kingdom

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For two countries that are so historically and culturally intertwined, the United Kingdom and the United States have dramatically different democracies. The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy with no single constitutional document, no

judicial review of the constitutionality of laws, a prime minister elected chief executive by the legislature, and a principle of legislative supremacy; this contrasts with the American republic, centered around a Constitution, separately elected legisla-

tures and executives, a Supreme Court, and a set of checks and balances and separations of powers between government actors.

Many countries follow certain aspects of the British model, but the aspect



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most unique to the United Kingdom is probably the lack of a single constitutional document. Rather than one core written charter that is amended periodically (as in most countries), the United Kingdom deems several documents to have constitutional significance. As the country developed its unified political system over the course of many centuries, several major acts shaped British political tradition. The constitutional documents include the Magna Carta of 1215, but also a range of other laws of great significance and stature. These include the Bill of Rights of 1689, which emphasized certain limitations on the power of the monarchy, and the Acts of Settlement of 1701, which established patterns of succession to the throne. In a sense, it may be said that the United Kingdom has a “written” constitution, but one that relies on a range of written documents rather than a single one. More generally, the “British Constitution” is partly shaped by tradition, custom, and a common cultural understanding of basic laws, powers, and functions of different political actors.

The British Constitution is one of the most flexible in the world, at least according to the law. This is not solely because the United Kingdom has an “unwritten” constitution, though this certainly relates to the question of how the constitution can be changed. Rather, the flexibility comes from the fact that in the British system, Parliament is sovereign. What does this mean? When Parliament passes a law, it is by definition constitutional, as the legislating body is the

highest political and legal authority in the land. Contrast this with the United States, in which the Constitution is the ultimate sovereign authority: Even Congress and presidents must act in accordance with its principles.

So why does Parliament not simply overturn long-standing parts of the British constitution on a whim? Why has there not been massive “zig-zagging” in terms of what the constitution means, from one election to the next, as new parties take power and lose power? In reality, custom and tradition prevent Parliament from overturning the founding laws of the polity. Much as American political parties would probably not envision getting rid of core elements of the Constitution such as the Bill of Rights, even if they had the supermajority they would need, so too does the British system exhibit constitutional stability from one elected government to the next.

The unwritten constitution and the fact of parliamentary sovereignty have one more implication for constitutionality in the United Kingdom: There is no role for the judiciary in ruling on whether a law is constitutional. In most countries, some judicial body has the power to rule on whether laws passed by the legislature are compatible with the written constitution. If that judicial body, such as the Supreme Court in the United States, finds a law unconstitutional it may strike it down. But if Parliament is sovereign and there is no single constitution, there is no place for judicial review. Thus, the United Kingdom had no real “Supreme Court”

until the 2000s, and even now its powers are limited to specific questions relating to issues of devolution of power to Scotland and Wales, along with very restricted responsibilities in the area of legal revision.

This limited judiciary should be of interest to Americans accustomed to a different system with its own controversies, especially the debate in the United States about whether unelected judges make law from the bench. This is referred to as “judicial activism,” and there is one clear way to end it: End judicial review. One argument against extensive use of judicial review is that judiciaries remove contentious issues from the public arena. According to this argument, debates about the most fundamental issues in a democracy are now increasingly fought out by ideologues and advocates in front of unelected judges. These issues are thus examined and decided upon by small groups and powerful individuals, and may not be reflective of broader public opinion. Those arguing against judicial activism would often prefer to have society’s most contentious issues decided in legislatures rather than in courts. The United Kingdom prevents judicial activism by granting Parliament unambiguous supremacy over the judiciary. One question for opponents of judicial activism is thus whether they would be willing to sacrifice judicial review. Put another way, judicial review and some judicial activism are the “flip side” of the checks and balances between branches of government: The U.K. system foregoes most of these checks and balances.



The Mother of Parliaments: The United Kingdom and the Westminster Model

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The United Kingdom is called “the Mother of Parliaments,” as its Parliament dates back to at least the thirteenth century, when King John convened the nobility of England as an advisory council that controlled the economy. In 1215, the nobility sensed the King’s weak position and need for the support of nobles to raise revenue for the crown, so they insisted upon a “Great Charter”—the Magna Carta—and thereby secured various rights with respect to property and requirements for royal consultation of the nobles. Since that time, Parliament has steadily gained power relative to the monarch, most notably beginning in the seventeenth century with the English Civil Wars and their aftermath (1642–1660), and with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Initially comprised of nobles (lords) and later also of commoners, these Parliaments evolved from advisory councils to become powerful legislatures that eventually asserted their sovereignty over the monarch. These origins can still be seen today in the existence of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

From these origins has come the system known worldwide as the Westminster system, after the London neighborhood where the government resides. Parliament is considered the country’s supreme and sovereign political power (see preceding section on Regime and Political

Institutions). While parliamentary sovereignty is the central fact of the United Kingdom’s political system, a variety of institutional mechanisms give the executive substantial power to push legislation through Parliament. The legislature votes, but the cabinet and the prime minister forward most legislation, on the assumption that the “backbenchers” in the governing party will support the government’s proposal. This model of parliamentary democracy has been used as a model by countries around the world, not least because of the influence of Britain’s colonial empire on many of today’s independent countries, from the giant India to tiny islands in the Caribbean.

In the British parliamentary model, the House of Commons is now the dominant chamber. It houses the executive branch of the prime minister and the cabinet, and has almost sole responsibility for passing laws, approving budgets, and holding the executive accountable; it can cause the government to fall by a vote of no confidence. Members of the House of Commons are chosen in single-member districts, in a “first-past-the-post” system in which the largest number of votes in a district suffices to elect a member of parliament (MP), even if this is only a plurality and not a majority. This electoral system is widely viewed as favoring the largest parties and punishing smaller parties.

The House of Lords is marginal by contrast, as is the monarchy. Though the founding body of Parliament, Lords progressively lost power to Commons over the centuries as the United Kingdom modernized and expanded the franchise. Lords now possesses some limited ability to slow Commons’ policymaking process by requesting further review. Major reforms in 1999 dramatically reduced the number of hereditary lords, and debate continues about eliminating hereditary peerages entirely. The Queen or King, meanwhile, retains powers to invite parties to form a government or accept a resignation, but these are almost purely ceremonial.

This Westminster parliamentary system is partially emulated in many other countries, though some countries established their own parliaments and assemblies independently of the United Kingdom in their early histories. While the United Kingdom and its Parliament may have been the Mother of Parliaments, there are few other places that precisely follow the House of Commons/House of Lords model; in most places with bicameral legislatures, the role of the upper chamber is more explicitly territorial, representing states, provinces, or regions. The lower chambers around the world, meanwhile, are elected in a variety of different electoral processes, as chapter 7 shows.



National Identity in the United Kingdom

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Many scholars see English nationalism as having developed early. Indeed, some see England as the first national society (Hastings 1997; Greenfeld 1992). Others see it as the first *modern* nationalism (Kohn 1944). Still others see English nationalism as developing rather late (Kumar 2003). As in all cases, this depends on how one defines "nationalism." Those who see English nationalism as developing early see it as linked to a number of prominent features of early modern English society, especially the distinctively modern political philosophy produced in the seventeenth century as well as the Civil Wars and the "Glorious Revolution" discussed earlier.

According to one major argument, English nationalism emerged in Tudor England and helped to resolve the status-inconsistency of upwardly mobile English persons favored by the Tudor monarchs (Greenfeld 1992). Before this, the word *nation* had referred to elite groups. Basically, defining England as a nation amounted to bestowing a kind of status on socially mobile English persons as a result of their membership. English nationalism was helped and hindered by a variety of actors. Queen Elizabeth seems to have promoted it, and Mary to have opposed it. English Protestantism contributed to its spread across society and down the social hierarchy.

Nationalism was clearly institutionalized as one of the main ways in which the state would legitimate itself by the establishment of constitutional monarchy in the late seventeenth century. One thing that had not been decided once and for all though, was the composition of the body

of the nation itself. Over the course of the "long eighteenth century" British, rather than English, nationalism was broadened to include the Scottish and Northern Irish (Colley 1992). In institutional terms, this was accomplished when union was established in 1707. In cultural terms, though, it is unclear to what extent it was successful. Irish nationalism gained strength with the movement of the United Irishmen in the late eighteenth century, and underwent another revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ireland was granted "home rule" status in 1912, but civil conflict developed, as the society was divided between those who favored an independent, Catholic Ireland and those (often Protestant) who favored continuing political ties to Britain. An insurrection led, finally, to the establishment of the (still dependent) Irish Free State in 1921, with its 1937 constitution to follow and its achievement of full independence, as the Republic of Ireland, in 1949. However, Northern Ireland remained (and remains to this day) part of the United Kingdom. Throughout the late twentieth century considerable violence was perpetrated by supporters of unification of the north with the Republic and supporters of continued ties to England, including terrorist bombings carried out both in Northern Ireland and in England itself by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and targeted assassinations and torture carried out by both sides. A peace process was initiated in the 1990s and yielded agreements in the 2000s. It has been largely successful in ending the violence. Scottish and Welsh national identities also underwent resurgence beginning in the late nineteenth

century. Initially, many of these efforts were focused on the preservation of cultural traditions, styles of life, and language. Some came to view British identity as the imposition of English "internal colonialism" (Hechter 1975). In recent years, resurgent regional (or perhaps national) identities among some of these groups, particularly the Scottish, have led toward efforts to decentralize authority and to establish some degree of regional autonomy (a process that bears useful comparison with somewhat similar developments in Spain). Scotland voted to create its own parliament and Wales its own assembly in 1997.

The predominant tradition of nationalism in the United Kingdom, according to most analysts, has been civic. This, however, should be qualified. In the early modern period national membership might have been civic in the sense of being open to some, but there were clear boundaries established between English nationals and members of "out-groups," most notably the Irish, American Indians, and African slaves. English nationalism's civic character, according to many analysts, was on display in the gradual process via which Great Britain or the United Kingdom was formed. That is, an ideal of "Britishness" developed that was inclusive of (at least some) Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish persons. Its civic character was also on display, paradoxically, in the United Kingdom's imperial identity. The empire, it was important to note, like all of European colonialism, was an important carrier of national identity, and a spur to the development of modern national identities in much of the colonial world. It spread national identity through providing an



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example, but also through fomenting resistance (Calhoun 1997: 108–110). Among other things, the British case shows well that civic nationalism, while existing in tension with racism, is nevertheless compatible with and can reinforce ethnic hierarchies of various kinds. More recently, as in a number of other countries whose national identities have been understood to

be civic, there has been some discussion of whether civic identity is being replaced by a multicultural model, whereas others have maintained that multiculturalism *is* civic or is broadly consistent with civic political traditions (Modood 2007).

In addition, as in most cases of civic nationalism, one sees counter-currents that dispute the civic conception of nation-

hood and propose an ethnic one in its place. In recent years in Britain this is best exemplified by the British National Party, with its sense of “Englishness” as an ethnic category and its xenophobic attitude toward immigrants, particularly Muslims, those from South Asia, and the Caribbean. Fortunately, this party remains marginal.



Liberal Ideology in the United Kingdom

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The United Kingdom is considered by many to be the birthplace of liberalism. The earliest architects of the ideology, such as John Locke and the Earl of Shaftesbury, wrote and acted in Britain in the tumultuous seventeenth century. Later British thinkers like Adam Smith and David Ricardo developed liberalism’s core economic doctrines. In the nineteenth century, the British philosopher John Stuart Mill produced what many consider to be the most forceful and coherent articulation of liberal doctrine, providing clear rationales for both its political dimensions, such as respect for the rights of the individual and representative government, and its economic dimensions, which above all involve reducing state involvement in the economy.

Some argue that the United Kingdom played an important role not only in developing liberalism, but also in *spreading* it.

British colonialism transmitted liberal ideas to elites in colonial societies. This is very clear in the cases of settler colonialism like today’s United States—which is considered liberalism’s “lead society” in today’s world, essentially replacing the United Kingdom in this connection—as well as British Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but may also be visible in the societies like India and in the former British colonial possessions in Africa and East Asia.

Some would argue that after the Second World War, liberalism went into partial retreat in Britain. It is true that the Labour Party, which dominated for several decades, blended liberalism and socialism into “social democracy.” Perhaps the most notable change was the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948. Old-fashioned liberals criticized the creation of a universal health care system as paternalistic and threatening

to individual choice. More progressive liberals, though, argued that investments in human capital and the maintenance of basic protections against serious deprivation are perfectly consistent with and even help to fulfill the goals and aspirations of a liberal and democratic polity.

Liberals closer to the right of the political spectrum typically would view social democracy as a betrayal, or at least a watering down, of liberal principles. Those on the radical left, however, view the liberalism of the Labour party as conservative and reactionary. In some ways these distinctions have been flattened out in recent Britain. Beginning in the 1990s, with the rise of Tony Blair’s “Third Way” leadership strategy in the Labour party, the British social democrats have shown themselves to remain clearly in the liberal camp.